



## Phone System Buyer's Guide

**2005 Edition**

## Overview

One of your most critical business assets – and most often overlooked – is your business phone system. Most of us take it for granted; however, it's the one asset that is touched by *every one of your customers, prospects, vendors, and employees*. Making certain your new phone system properly addresses all of your organizations internal and external needs should not be left to chance.

Buying a new phone system is a major decision. Business phone systems can be programmed with literally hundreds of features today, offered by thousands of manufacturers and distributors. You can spend time and money comparing feature, after feature, after feature – most of which you will *never* use – or, you can approach this problem using the information in this guide.

This guide will help you sort through the hundreds of options to select a reliable, easy-to-use phone system that meets your needs today and can expand with your business for the future.

## Introduction

At Teldata South, we know buying a phone system is a **big decision** for any company. That's why we created this FREE guide, *Phone System Buyer's Guide*, which explains what you really need to know to select the phone system that is right for you.

If your business is considering a new phone system and you need a reliable, user-friendly system with functionality for today and room for growth tomorrow, this guide will show you how to compare any phone system side-by-side to clearly determine which one is best for your business.

This guide will help you sort through the hundreds of options available to select the system that is a perfect fit. By following this guide, you will determine the phone system that best meets your business needs now and in the future for the lowest cost.

## Comparing Business Phone System Features

There are hundreds of phone features available today, especially with the industry shift toward VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). Many features are easily programmed within your phone system. So, how do you compare all the systems with all the options to make the best decision?

Numerous industry studies have shown that most companies use *about four or five* of all the phone features available to them. That's it. So, why spend countless hours comparing things that don't matter?

Compare *how* the phone system will be used by your organization; don't compare feature against feature. First, determine your requirements and understand how the new phone system will be used within your company. This will help determine which features are really needed. Then, compare that information among the various manufacturers/distributors you are considering. By comparing how you will use the system (instead of doing a feature to feature comparison), you will be focused on what matters most to your company instead of being distracted by dozens of features you will never use.

While having the right phone features for your business is important, **easy-to-access** and **ease-of-use** are even more important. If a particular phone feature is difficult to use or you can't remember how to use it, then you will stop using it. The truth of the matter is this – most employees devote very little time to learn how to use a new phone system. The easier a phone feature is to use and access, the more likely that it will be used. Identify which button(s) – and *how many* buttons – are needed to access a particular feature; don't stop at just noting the phone system has that feature. One-button access to features usually prevails over multi-button. Look for systems that are extremely simple and intuitive to operate.

## Phone System Warranties/Support

Your new phone system is crucial to the ongoing operation of your business. Therefore, it must work – and work properly – all the time. It might look good, have all the latest bells and whistles, and boast the newest technology, but if it drops calls, loses voice mail messages, and is in a constant state of maintenance and repair...what good is it? Here is some insider information that can make a big difference when considering reliability and the total cost of your new system.

Most people think “a warranty is a warranty”. However, all warranties are not the same. There are two types of warranties – manufacturer and distributor/dealer – and the differences can be significant.

**Manufacturer warranties** are provided by the phone system manufacturer. This warranty usually covers the equipment only and does not cover labor. The warranty coverage varies by manufacturer; however, most are for two years. Some manufacturers have extended warranties that can be purchased at an additional cost that can extend the warranty coverage to five years or more. The manufacturer’s warranty will usually be passed on the dealer so make sure that your dealer will support the full term of the manufacturer’s warranty.

**Distributor/Dealer warranties** are provided by the business phone system distributor and vary considerably. It is possible that the distributor’s warranty is the manufacturer’s, simply passed along to the buyer. However, in many cases the distributor offers a warranty that sounds “too good to be true.” This is usually because the distributor has doubled or tripled the coverage of the manufacturer’s warranty. While this may look good on paper, beware – *the distributor warranty is only as good as the distributor*. If the distributor goes out of business or cannot live up to its warranty, well, there goes your warranty.

### **Warranty Comparison Tips:**

- Make certain you clarify exactly which items are covered under the manufacturer's warranty and which are covered under the distributor's warranty.
- Only consider phone systems from manufacturers with ISO 9001, 9002 and 14001 manufacturing facilities. These ISO standards ensure the manufacturing facility conforms to strict processes, which ensures reliable, high-quality products.
- Out-of-box failure rates (measures how many system components fail when removed from the box) are one way to compare manufacturers. Look for low failure rates – approximately 0.0007% or less – and request documentation for the manufacturer's claim.
- Another common metric is the Mean Time Between Failure (MTBF) rate. This measures the amount of time between a phone system failure. While more subjective than other metrics, it's still good information to have for phone systems you are considering so you are aware before making a decision. Similar to out-of-box failure rates, ask for supporting documentation for any claims made.

Know this information *before* you make a decision; it can be the difference between years of hassle-free operation versus a constant stream of headaches.

## System Upgrades and Expandability

For many businesses, selecting and installing a new phone system is a major endeavor. Telephony technology is advancing rapidly with new milestones and innovations being reached on a regular basis. You want to make certain you select a phone system that meets your needs today and can easily upgrade and expand to meet your business needs in the future.

Upgrades refer to system enhancements provided by the manufacturer. These upgrades usually address system operational efficiencies, etc. Look for a phone system that easily upgrades – something your business can handle on its own if you so choose, rather than requiring the manufacturer's or other third party involvement.

Expandability refers to how the phone system can grow to meet the needs of your growing company. Your company growth may include additional office locations or employees, and you want a system that can expand accordingly. Look for systems that provide system administration tools so you can handle any moves, adds or changes to the new phone system.

While a phone system tends to be the most overlooked business asset, it can provide the most return on investment and long-term reliability for your business. Most businesses dedicate a significant amount of budget to office equipment, including PCs, which quickly become obsolete in a matter of months. A phone system however, provides long-term scalability as it grows with your business into the future with simple feature add-ons and upgrades of the newest technology. With a scalable phone system, you get a more cost-effective and reliable solution that enables you the flexibility to grow at your own pace and gradually add the technology and functionality you require to stay competitive.

## Conclusion

While the challenge of selecting a new phone system may initially appear daunting, it is quite manageable by following the suggestions in this guide. You should capitalize on the opportunity to select a new phone system that can provide cost savings and phone features that can give you a competitive edge.

The technology is constantly improving to provide more features with easier administration and end-user training. Below are some of the features that can improve your productivity, and ensure you operate as efficiently as possible:

- **Unified Communications** provides “one-stop” access to all e-mail, fax and voice messages from an email client, cell phone and PDA.
- **Voice-Activated Automated Attendant** provides speech-enabled call routing allowing you and your customers to simply speak menu and directory selections.
- **Text-to-Speech** technology allows users to access and listen to email messages over the phone.
- **Remote Teleworker Support** allows employees to access the phone system network from anywhere in the world as if they were sitting at their office desk.
- **ACD** or Automatic Call Distribution is often thought of as a “call center” feature. But using ACD functionality can greatly improve your efficiency in call processing and customer service.
- **In-Building Wireless** technology can often be integrated into the phone system to enable you with access to calls and system features via a wireless handset while away from your desktop telephone. Beware of “after market” solutions that can experience integration problems or not deliver the full feature set of the phone system.

For additional information on conducting a business phone system assessment, or any of the products and services provided by Teldata South, please visit [www.teldatasouth.com](http://www.teldatasouth.com) or call (800) 667-2731.

## **About Teldata South, LLC**

Teldata South provide powerful, integrated communications solutions, providing all the tools you need to succeed, including digital telephone systems, wired and wireless business telephones, call center hardware and software, voice messaging systems, and IP telephony solutions. With a comprehensive solution set that is easy to deploy and maintain, our commitment stands strong – provide high-technology solutions together with unmatched customer support. We like to call this ***“Communications without Compromise”!***